Who Is the “Us” in Genesis 1.26 according to Michael Heiser?

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> *Genesis 1.26*
> *Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*

This passage has intrigued Bible students for millennia. To whom is God speaking here? Is he deliberating with himself? Is he using a plural of majesty? Do we find here a plurality within the one God? Mike Heiser offers the following helpful explanation.

> *Many Bible readers note the plural pronouns (us; our) with curiosity. They might suggest that the plurals refer to the Trinity, but technical research in Hebrew grammar and exegesis has shown that the Trinity is not a coherent explanation.*
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> *Michael S. Heiser, The Unseen Realm (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press 2015), p. 39.*

He continues in a lengthy footnote:

> *Seeing the Trinity in Gen 1:26 is reading the New Testament back into the old Testament, something that isn't a sound interpretive method for discerning what an Old Testament writer was thinking. Unlike the New Testament, the Old Testament has no Trinitarian phrases (e.g., "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"; cf Matt 28:19-20). The triune godhead idea is never transparently expressed in the Old Testament. Since…other references to divine plurality involve divine beings who are lesser than Yahweh, we must be careful about attributing the language of divine plurality to the Trinity. Doing so will get us into theological trouble in other passages….The answer to the plurality language is also not the "plural of majesty." As Joüon-Muraoka notes, "The we of majesty does not exist in Hebrew"…The plural of majesty does exist for nouns…but Gen 1:26 is not about the nouns–the issue is the verbal forms.*
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> *ibid.*

So, if Genesis 1.26 is not employing the plural of majesty or manifesting some kind of inner plurality, then what is going on? Heiser continues:

> *The solution is much more straightforward, one that an ancient Israelite would have readily discerned. What we have is a single person (God) addressing a group–the members of his divine council.*
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> *It's like me going int a room of friends and saying, "Hey, let's go get some pizza!" I'm the one speaking. A group is hearing what I say. Similarly, God comes to the divine council with an exciting announcement: "Let's create humankind!"*
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> *But if God is speaking to his divine council here, does that suggest that humankind was created by more than one elohim? Was the creation of humankind a group project? Not at all. Back to my pizza illustration: If I am the one paying for the pizza–making the plan happen after announcing it–then I retain both the inspiration and the initiative for the entire project. That's how Genesis 1:26 works.*
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> *ibid., pp. 39-40.*

Now, this makes a lot of sense, but the question then comes up, "So are you saying that 'angels' helped God make the first humans?" Heiser, once again:

> *Genesis 1:27 tells us clearly that only God himself does the creating. In the Hebrew, all the verbs of creation in the passage are singular in form: "So God created humankind in his image, in the likeness of God he created him." The other members of the council do not participate in the creation of humankind. They watch, just as they did when God laid the foundations of the earth (Job 37:7)*
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> *ibid.*

This understanding fits like a glove with the three other "us passages" in the Hebrew Bible. Here they are for your consideration:

> *Genesis 3.22*
> *Then the LORD God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever– “*
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> *Genesis 11.7*
> *Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.”*
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> *Isaiah 6.8*
> *And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”*

In each case, God is speaking to his angelic host. He’s suggesting an action and including them in the process. We know that “the sons of God” existed before creation (Job 38.7), so it makes perfect sense that these were the ones to whom God was speaking when he said, “us” in Genesis 1.26.